DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 743 SP 011 721

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TITLE African Values and American Teachers in Ethiopia: A Cross-Cultural Experience.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; *African Culture; Behavior Patterns; *Culture Conflict; Democratic Values; Foreign Culture; Humanism; Political Attitudes; Social Differences; *Social Systems; *Social Values; Student Teachers; *Teaching Procedures
IDENTIFIERS *Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

In this article the experience of an American teacher in Ethiopia is related. An attempt to teach English to African students by a method other than simple rote learning brought about a conflict with Ethiopian supervisors. Reasons for the conflict are analyzed and different values and political perspectives are discussed as possible sources of divergent educational practices in Ethiopia and America. The question is raised as to whether different social and value systems influence what may be considered as effective or good teaching in different countries. (JD)

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ED148743

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AFRICAN VALUES AND AMERICAN TEACHERS IN ETHIOPIA: A CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

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In Africa, not long ago, I observed a teacher-training program in one school setting. The student teachers were American, and they were teaching English to senior high school students. Most of the teachers taught grammar through recitation. Perhaps they chose this method because it seemed to them to be the easiest and surest way to teach. Perhaps they thought they could avoid being caught without an answer, because they could depend upon the rule in the grammar book as the final answer. Perhaps they felt insecure with other approaches because they knew that what they were doing had been used in this school for many years. Whatever their reasons, the student teachers continued this memory approach to learning. The books were memorized by some of the students prior to this time. These books were the only English grammar books to be found in this small town. They were published in England for very young English children. They were thought to be appropriate for these African secondary students because the students were beginners in English. It was expected that the material would be used by the supervisors. The fact that this approach to teaching was based on memory alone did not seem to occur to those who were involved. The fact that the teacher's use of one text limited the learning process of the students did not seem to deter the student teachers. No one noticed that the book was not appropriate for the students. If they did notice these shortcomings, they made the best of them, without trying to change them. After all, should they be the ones to question these things? Should they try to change such a regime? Isn't their main goal, as student teachers, simply to be successful in their immediate efforts? Doesn't their success depend upon making everyone happy? Everyone in

this picture was indeed happy: The student teachers kept absolute control of their classes throughout their performance. There was no sign of a discipline problem. In fact, there was not even a sign of disagreement in the classroom, because all of the questions had one answer. In this way, then, the respect of the students and the supervisor was won. Most of all, everyone was happy: The students felt "bright", because they had all the "right" answers at their fingertips. The supervisors were happy because their objectives were being met; and, finally, the student teachers felt properly efficient in their efforts. In such a happy setting, what more could be desired?

To gain insight into this situation, we will look at the attitudes of the student teachers and their supervisors. Then, we will try to understand these attitudes in the light of their respective value systems. If we look for reasons for their behavior, we might say that they were afraid to express their opinions. Having been educated in the United States, these student teachers must have had some democratic ideals. They must have had some inclination towards individual creativity and independence. Why didn't they speak out? Their silence and conformity may be explained by an element noted in research done by Sherif, in which he found that an individual who is placed in an objectively unstable situation, where the external frame of reference is eliminated, is influenced by the group in the formation of his norms and attitudes.[1] Such an influence may be the effects of what is commonly referred to as "culture shock". Another reason for the behavior of the student teachers could be that their innovations meant possible failure in their efforts at student teaching. They were being reinforced for conforming to

traditional teaching methods by a successful student teaching experience. Another reason may be that they felt that they lacked the proper training to try to introduce new techniques. Bruner says that the type of teaching which requires intuitive thinking requires special training.[2] It may be, also, that because they were visitors, they did not feel at liberty to criticize.

One student teacher did not follow this pattern of conformity. She introduced a language arts unit, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, and involved the students in reading newspapers and the African novels written in English. In this way, the students used their grammar rules at a higher cognitive level, the level of comprehension. A discussion about such readings required all the members of the class to think at that level. It also stimulated spoken English among the students, and led the students to translate the articles into main ideas, and to formulate sentences, in English, on their own. Judgment was needed to select the main ideas, and differences of opinion brought students to an awareness of new interpretations of the stories or news articles. The oral encounters of everyday conversation in the classroom developed in the students the ability to apply the grammar rules which they had memorized. Their ability to converse was a good sign of their understanding of grammar rules in a working form. A creative writing project tested their ability to synthesize knowledge of the language into original articles, essays and short stories. Gathering their articles into a school newspaper required the students to revise, select, and edit. These activities called for the highest form in Bloom's Taxonomy in the cognitive domain: evaluation.[4]

In the Affective domain, she attempted to enlist the interest of her African students. This student teacher used many African resources, but she started with Things Fall Apart, a novel by Chinua Achebe. She not only intended to make the students aware of what other Africans are writing in English, but she also thought that they would like it better than the grammar book. She also stimulated creative writing through an appeal to their national pride by inviting them to compete with other Africans. Most of her students had a strong self-image, and this student teacher could see that it was related closely to their national pride. Sherif has found that this pride offers an effective tool for motivating, because of its strength.[5] The practical and creative projects she used in her class were built upon the theme of social and civic improvement. One of her aims was to link the students' original contributions to the motivation of helping others. The projects included a "Clean-up" campaign to fight disease. The class used posters, magazine and newspaper articles, letters to various groups, leaflets, and public discussions in order to get the public to use measures of more effective sanitation. These methods were used to point out that disease is often caused by neglect; and can be controlled by the people's own actions. The effort to find solutions to human problems stimulates open attitudes in the students. Foreign visitors shared in class discussions on a range of topics, and broadened the students' viewpoints, as well as introducing new methods of prevention of disease. The students were exposed to a natural use of the English language by their visitors. They also saw a pattern of open inquiry, which was modeled by their teacher who invited the visitor to the classroom.

When the supervisors observed the project of this forward-thinking student teacher, their reactions were negative. She was criticized for teaching everything except English, which was the only subject that she was expected to teach. When she explained her rationale, she was told that she was teaching some kind of psychology, instead of English. She offered them some books on the subject, but they said they were too busy to read them. She was cautioned, though, to "stick to English".

Why did the supervisors react as they did? Were they insulted by the "Clean-up" campaign? What caused them to reinforce the conforming behavior of the other student teachers, but to protest against the behavior of the one who was different? How could this student teacher change her behavior to be more effective? Or does she belong there at all? Do progressive ideas have a place in such a situation? Need they be introduced at all? In such a traditional climate as this, are the people ready to assimilate such ideas? Can an open classroom survive in a closed country? Who will introduce such changes? How will the introduction proceed? Did the barriers to understanding reside in the student teachers or in their supervisors? Was the problem one of attitudes or was there an underlying clash of values here?

In order to understand the behavior of the student teachers some would say that we need to study its setting as a "social field". Lewin would say that this social happening occurred in, and as a result of, a whole context of social and psychological entities, ranging from the background of the student teachers and the supervisors to the surrounding viewpoints of the nation and the community where it happened.[6]

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"...What does it really matter?" is a common response of the natives in reply to the astonishment and horror of tourists at certain aspects of their way of life. There are some basic differences between Africans and Americans that we must consider. These groups of people have different ways of eating, dressing, working, living: Generally, they have different ways of behaving. The American student teachers were surely affected by these differences in some way. Were they reinforcing error by remaining silent? Did their silence signify a change in values or only a change in attitude? Were they silent because they respected a value system different from their own?

These questions present a problem that philosophers have been dealing with for centuries. Moore says that values are indefinable.[7] Kluckhohn[8] defines them, but Rokeach disagrees with his definition on philosophical grounds. Rokeach defines them like this:

> A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence.[9]

In distinguishing values from attitudes, he, furthermore, makes it clear that values involve a more ultimate goal and have a more transcendental quality. However, his definition is broad enough, also, to include things such as food, which have no ethical connotations. Although this paper refers to values in such a broad sense, it must be said that values, philosophically, have no test. If we question them, we must always ask, first, "...From whose point of view"? However, Randall says, that we do, in fact set up standards, that people are often convinced, that disagreement is often based upon a reason, with no chaos of values.[10]

This statement implies that all men recognize the validity of reason as a criterion for change. Upon this basis, then, we can say that Africans change their values when they see a good reason for changing them. Pragmatists say that the test of values lies in what is useful.[11] If we look at the matter from this viewpoint, we might say that since public sanitation is good for the health of everyone, that it should be reasonable to try to change the opposite viewpoint. To pursue the pragmatic approach, we can say that tourists, whose trade stimulates the economy of the country, appreciate public sanitation. If tourist trade is desired, then it is wise to show that the host country is concerned about the health and enjoyment of its visitors. One can see the promotion of tourism, then, as a good reason to try to change the public habits of sanitation.

On the other hand, to try to change appreciation for the music of the people, is, even from a pragmatic view, not reasonable, as such. Music is not concerned with usefulness or reason. It is like the national costume: It expresses the culture and the people, themselves. To attempt to change these threatens to insult the pride of the people for no good reason. This pride may well be the cornerstone for building more important changes. Such an attempt also threatens to damage a warm personal relationship which is enjoyable as well as useful for making future important changes: To damage this relationship may destroy the willingness to receive ideas.[12]

It is worth questioning, in the light of a reasonable attempt to change people, whether or not the student teacher is the best person to carry out a basic change. Upon investigating the problem, we find differing viewpoints. Cohen cites studies done by Hovland, Kellman, and Mandel, which agree with his contention that the credibility of the

communicator determines variations in attitude change: that is, that the greater the trustworthiness of expertness, the greater the change towards the position advocated by the communicator.[13] On the basis of these findings, we view the student teacher as the least likely person to cause substantial attitude changes, even if they are reasonable, due to the lack of his experience and expertise. On the other hand, it can be said that these student teachers, with one exception, were performing according to a set of values that were, presumably, different from their own, without making clear these differences. The expression of diverse opinions does seem plausible here, if done with tact. Stagner has done research that bears out the principle that an emotionally charged one-sided presentation is often very effective in bringing about an attitude change.[14] However, such behavior in this situation may well have been a disaster, bordering upon an international incident. In this context, one may hold that the wisest point of view is that of Burleson, who says that, in the long run, the reserved judgment of an uncertain response may be closer to the goal of a true international understanding.[15] Hopefully, our student teachers aim at making both a useful change as well as establishing a good feeling between nations. Perhaps the greater change may best be made then, by waiting. In so doing, the student teacher can grow into the role of a respected leader, by first being a concerned member of the community. This role promises to aid her in effecting more basic changes founded upon reason.

Getzels has pointed out that little differentiation in training and placement has been made between prospective teachers for one locality and those for another.[16] Had our student teachers received more insight into this African culture before they began their actual teaching experiency, they might have responded with more confidence and expertise.

To understand the background of the supervisors, we must consider that, as Africans, they were educated in the same system they now espouse. This system reflects the values of the society to which it belongs. One view held by some African parents is that obedience is the single most important quality involved in adult economic adaptation, and they are concerned that their children have the capacity to survive in a world of scarce and unstable resources. In light of this consideration, Levine says that these parents interpret classroom learning as an exercise in obedience by the child, who is expected to do what the teacher tells him to do and whose poor performance is seen as disobedience.[17] It is no wonder then, that the African supervisors put a high premium upon classroom control and teacher dominance.

Suppose that the supervisors had agreed to make a change: Even educators of high rank find it difficult to make changes in the school system, if they desire to, so that if our supervisors saw a need for adaptation, they would not have acted. This difficulty is due to the entrenched traditions, as well as to their lack of power, as a professional group, in the general system. Many educators feel that change is hopeless, even if they did have the power to effect it. One reason for this feeling is the need to conform to the traditional practice, borrowed from England, of giving National Examinations. Because many students are failed out of school on the basis of these test scores, most educators fear that an attempt to change their teaching techniques may risk their students' chances of succeeding in these exams. Their concern is probably justified, because the exams are geared to the same level of thinking as their classroom instruction. Furthermore, coupled with other social

policies practiced in the country, such as legalized prostitution, the failure of this examination is nothing short of disaster for women. While even servile jobs are given to men, such women are doomed to a life of prostitution. Ironically, the academically late bloomer may be a girl who has the one wise mind that could be the salvation of her country in any number of ways - perhaps through the revision of its educational system! The fact that our one independent student teacher was a woman could be another factor explaining why her program failed in this land where the rights of women are not recognized. After all, although most of the other student teachers were women, they behaved as women "ought" to behave in this social system. Perhaps the supervisors' reception of ideas was restricted by their own values and what they expected to come from a woman.

Some of the student teachers, instead of changing Africa, found that Africa had changed them. Some of them married Africans and modified their own value systems in making adjustments to their marriages. When they were asked, they said that they had found a great human warmth and compassion in Africans that they had not found in Americans. Although this characteristic of basic humanity could be the same element responsible for such things as a lack of public sanitation, these women preferred to value this basic sense of humanity to the sterile western ways, which seemed heartless and gutless to them. Such feelings may be attitudes, but we might trace them to a basically different way of looking at human nature.

"...What does it really matter?" these Americans said.

Ultimately, perhaps, the best people to change Africe are the Africans, themselves. Those who have visited foreign countries can see the differences which point to a needed change. However, do the differences point to a needed change in their eyes? Or, again, does the decision depend upon the matter of values? Is it a matter of values, though, to decide for a starving nation that various levels of thinking is a subject to be concerned about? Humanistically, can we say that thinking on various levels can create opportunities for a better life? ...This is a truly human problem! Frantz Fannon may speak for the African intellectual. He has addressed the issue in this way:

> If man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation. If this building up is true, that is to say, if it interprets the manifest will of the people, and reveals the eager African peoples, then the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universaling values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture.[18]

In conclusion, we must focus on a basic difference underlying the two cultures in question. The difference is in the area of freedom of speech. Such freedom appears to be closely related to thinking. The more freely people speak, the more they, as a group, are exposed to new ideas. The group, thus, stimulates its own thought in the varying views.

The very experience of freedom, itself, seems to cause thinking. This African nation has been so dominated by the thought of its emperor that public thinking has been overlooked. In fact, various viewpoints

have been nearly outlawed! The public media has portrayed only the view of the emperor: the one right answer. The education of these people is in keeping with the political aims of the country, perhaps. Free thinking is restrained by their education, because an openly expressed and differing viewpoint may threaten the power of the ruling class. Such suppression is comparable to Bettleheim's description of the Nazi prison camps, in which the prisoners were like "...serfs...who accepted the values of the masters while they still thought they were following their life's goal and values." The main goal was to produce childlike attitudes and childlike dependency on the will of the leaders."[19] (This tendency could also be seen in the student teachers.) Such attitudes may not be intended by the rulers of this African country, but whether they are intended or not, they are the natural outcome of such an educational system.

We can see problems arising even in the teaching of English, because to apply any language to its fullest, freedom is essential. To learn it, must we not apply it? Bloom says: "Independence of thought and action are defended largely on social grounds: a democratic society thrives best when its citizens are able to arrive at their decision rather than when someone in authority does the thinking for them."[20]

Do the roots of the problem lie in the fact that our educational theory is democratic in essence and has no use in an educational system based on a different philosophy or form of government? Are we arriving at the problem from a strictly one-sided viewpoint? After all, the authorities cited here are (except for Fannon) speaking from a western and democratic viewpoint.

Is it really necessary for the mind to be free to be formed? We know that Bruner would affirm this in the name of open inquiry. McVickers Hunt says that the structure of our faculties are formed by their very function.[21] If they are not free to be used in every way, this structure must be limited by that lack of use. This statement leads to the decision that we are speaking of a value difference worth changing, because it is reasonable: Isn't the growth of human minds something to value in itself? Isn't it a good cause for change? Is it the nature of a rational being to be free? Is such a change not only more appropriate to the dignity and freedom of a rational being, but also more useful to his entire civilization? Are creative products the sign of free minds? Are they restricted to free minds? Is it the nature of thought, itself, to be free? Such guessing may invite more thought if the question were left open here.

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